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SUBJECT: KOSOVO ASSEMBLY DECLARES INDEPENDENCE, ADOPTS NEW  
FLAG OF THE REPUBLIC OF KOSOVO

REF: USOP E-MAIL SITREP OF 1700 LOCAL FEBRUARY 17

1. (U) The Kosovo Assembly adopted a declaration of independence at 1550 local time on February 17, followed by the adoption of a new national flag. The vote on the declaration was 109 to zero; the 11 absent deputies were all Kosovo Serbs, who did not participate in the session. Most international liaison offices, and all of the key European countries, were represented at the session. UNMIK SRSG Ruecker did not attend.

2. (U) President Sejdiu, Prime Minister Thaci and Assembly Speaker Krasnigi spoke prior to the adoption of the declaration. In remarks previewed earlier with USOP, Sejdiu and Thaci stressed themes of multi-ethnicity and democracy, and reviewed the historical circumstances that brought Kosovo to this moment. They also strongly reaffirmed Kosovo's commitment to the Ahtisaari plan. Speaking for several minutes in Serbian, Sejdiu made a special appeal to the Kosovo Serb community, saying "Kosovo is your home." Sejdiu -- again in Serbian -- made specific reference to the preservation of Serbian Orthodox cultural heritage in Kosovo. Thaci also delivered a part of his speech in Serbian, emphasizing similar themes.

3. (U) Thaci read the declaration and, upon adoption, every member of the Assembly was invited to sign the document. The Assembly then adopted the new flag of Kosovo by acclamation. The flag's blue and gold color scheme reflects Kosovo's European aspirations; its six white stars over the map of Kosovo reflect its diverse ethnic communities. (Both the declaration and the new flag were e-mailed to Department and other addressees.)

4. (U) As of 1645 local, KFOR, UNMIK and the Kosovo Police Service (KPS) reported no security incidents within Kosovo. Earlier in the day, some 200 men approached the Serbian side of the Gate 3 border crossing point near Podujevo, but Serbian police handled the situation. UN sources in Mitrovica reported a group of Serb men on the north side of the Austerlitz bridge, but added that the group was quiet and orderly. A demonstration is scheduled for 2000 local in the northern municipality of Leposavic, but police will be in attendance. At 1710, COMKFOR read a pre-planned statement calling for calm and stressing that violence would not be tolerated.

5. (U) Serbian ministers and parliamentarians have been present today throughout the north and Serb enclaves in the south. Minister for Kosovo Samardzic was in north Mitrovica to address local crowds, while Deputy Prime Minister Djelic went to Strpce. PM Kostunica, however, did not make an appearance in Kosovo.

6. (U) Immediately upon adoption of the declaration, Embassy Skopje consular chief issued the Department-cleared warden message. That message also appears on the USOP internet site.

7. (U) Thaci and Sejdiu are scheduled to address the media at the Pristina press center (specially set up by the Kosovo government in cooperation with the ICOPT), where they will deliver remarks -- also previewed with USOP -- reinforcing the common themes of inclusiveness and multi-ethnic democracy. A formal concert by the Kosovo Philharmonic with European-themed music, centered around Beethoven's Ode to

Joy, is scheduled for 1900 local, followed by celebrations in other venues in Pristina and other towns.

18. (U) As of 1830 local, Kosovo's draft constitution will be posted on [www.kosovoconstitution.info](http://www.kosovoconstitution.info). The constitution was drafted by a Kosovar working group consisting of local experts and representatives of all political parties, including Serb and non-Serb minority representatives, with the assistance of USOP/USAID, the ICOPT, and the Council of Europe's Venice Commission. The Ahtisaari plan's elements have been carefully included in the text of the draft constitution. Following its posting on the web site, the draft will be subject to a public comment period lasting approximately two weeks, with further time necessary to

include some of the comments in the draft. The final version should be ready for Assembly approval within a month.

19. (U) The first tranche of Ahtisaari-related legislation will be sent to the Assembly on Monday, February 18, with adoption targeted for Wednesday. Included in the first tranche of ten laws are key drafts on decentralization and the preservation of Serbian cultural and religious heritage.  
KAIDANOW